

Wendy's January Prayer Thoughts

I am always thrilled to hear of archaeological discoveries which shed light on Biblical text. During cave surveys carried out by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem 1986-1989, in the Lower Wadi- el - Makkuk, in the Judean Desert, a seed 1; 8 cm long, weighing 0.565 g was discovered and put into storage. In 2010 Sarah Sallon, a member of the Middle East Medicinal Plant Projects, planted it in a pot, with help from colleagues. Naming it 'Sheba', she told the Jewish Post that it was a strong contestant for the source of the enigmatic 'Tsori', the balsam resin producing tree mentioned in the Old Testament. Radio carbon dating estimates the seed 993-1202. A.D. Sequencing and other tests were also conducted, identifying the species as *Commiphora*; the same family as frankincense and myrrh. Analysis of the leaves showed it was not used for aromatic or smelling, but for medicinal purposes.

The first mention of 'Tsori' is in the book of Genesis. Joseph had been stripped of his robe by his brothers and thrown into a dry pit, where they were hoping he would die. "They sat down to eat, and looking up saw a caravan of Ishmaelite coming from Gilead, with their camels carrying gum, palm and resin on their way to carry it down to Egypt." 37:25. little did the brothers know that they would be travelling to Egypt to procure grain, during the famine in the Land of Canaan. Joseph was Governor over the land with the responsibility of selling to the people. He recognised his brothers as they bowed before him, and explained their mission. Speaking through an interpreter, he accused them of being spies. Unaware of who he was, they pleaded, "We your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of a certain man in the land of Canaan, the youngest is now with our father, and one is no more." They were imprisoned for three days, and then released on condition that Simeon remained in prison, until they returned with their youngest. The nine went home with grain for their families. Israel, their father, agreed to Joseph's command, sending them back with Benjamin, and a gift of "some of the best products of the land, a little balm, a little honey, some spices, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds."-43...

Jeremiah also speaks of balm. He preached and prophesied for forty years warning the people of Israel and Judah with messages from God of judgement and doom, beseeching them to change their ways. This was hard for Jeremiah, because he was a sensitive person, who cared deeply. He urges them to turn back to God, so that they would be spared from further captivity and exile. In turning to idolatry, had they forgotten how God had delivered His people from slavery in Egypt? He laments the whole situation, and pleads with God: "Is there any balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my people not been restored? 8:22. He knew that balm was available, and that it was a healing balm when applied. But, the people were not prepared to access it, and put it on. What they desperately needed was a spiritual balm, accessed by accepting and seeking God; by listening to, and obeying their spiritual leaders; and by cleansing....

Meditate on the verse: "Turn to God as He can wipe away your sins, pour out blessing to refresh you, and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely Jesus." Acts 3:19. MSG Offer up a prayer. Lord I turn to You in humility, longing to be embraced again in Your loving arms. I confess that Your ways are always perfect... I regret that mine are so often distancing and damaging. Help me to face my shortcomings and admit them openly to You now. Forgive me and strengthen me to resist the temptation to conform to the world. Take the scale from my eyes that I may not be blinded. Amen.

The Biblical Tsori has its habitat in the historic region of Gilead, in the Dead Sea Rift Valley. The Hebrew name is derived from GAL - 'a heap, or mound hill', and ED - 'a witness or a testimony.' It is a mountainous region. In ancient times it was richly forested, with low fertile valleys, renowned too as a caravan route, also as the birthplace of the Prophet Elijah. Today, it occupies the North Western Region of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Christians know that Christ is the Balm who heals all who come to Him. This has been highlighted by the words of an American African spiritual of hope and encouragement originally sung by the slaves as they toiled in the fields from sun rise to sun set. Since many could not read, the songs were a way of absorbing Scripture...

Chorus. There is a balm in Gilead,
 To make the wounded whole,
 There is a balm in Gilead,
 To heal the sin sick soul.

V.1, Sometimes I feel discouraged,
 And think my work is vain,
 But then the Holy Spirit,
 Revives my soul again.

V.2. If you cannot pray like Peter,
 If you cannot preach like Paul,
 You can tell the love of Jesus,
 And say He died for all.

Jeremiah asked the rhetorical question "Is there any balm in Gilead?" He knew the God of salvation, and yearned for them to turn to God and be healed. His prophecies extended to lands where the God of Israel was unknown. Our enslaved brothers and sisters assured us "There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin sick soul." It is the precious blood of Jesus which "makes the wounded whole." Jesus offered up His life at Calvary by shedding His blood for **all**, to bring them back to God, in order to know Him, and receive new life. The balm can be seen as a metaphor of God's mercy and love. The Hebrew word Tsori literally means 'to crack by pressure', 'to leak.' The root of the word means 'run blood.' The healing properties of balm did not come from the stems or leaves, but from the resin which flowed after the bark had been bruised and cut. This reminds us of Isaiah's prophesy about the Messiah. "He was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed." God always had a plan for the healing of all peoples. Meditate on Romans 5:8. NIV. "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith."

Jesus, God's own Son, is the Saviour the world.